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## Wells could be victims of freeway

*ADOT would ensure supply*

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Add another casualty to the list of bulldozed structures if the proposed South Mountain Freeway is built along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills.

Along with about 220 homes, at least four wells that feed two large fresh-water lakes in the Lakewood master-planned community and a golf course would be destroyed to make way for the freeway under the current proposal. The loss would be small compared with the homes but it represents a real worry for residents of the community and its property management company.

"Our name is Lakewood," said Doug Cole, president of the Lakewood Community Association, when asked how important the wells are to the area. "Our big amenities are two lakes, 30 acres apiece. The community was built around the lakes."

None of the wells supplies drinking water to the community, although they originally were used for farming and settlement uses.

The Arizona Department of Transportation has promised to move the wells and the pipes that move the water to north of Pecos Road. But opponents to the freeway route say it's unclear as to where.

"That's my question," said Blanche Prokes, manager of the Lakewood Community Association and a member of the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee.

Several years ago, Prokes asked ADOT to commit in writing that it would pay to move the wells south of Pecos Road at 40th Street if the freeway interferes with their operation.

"It's a miracle that I got what I got from them," she said.

The letter is dated Jan. 7, 2004, and states: "If a future ADOT project affects any of the wells, we would either have to pay to relocate the well or make provisions for a water delivery system to allow the continued use of the well."

But it's unclear where ADOT would drill new wells to tap groundwater.

Several years ago, the owners of the Foothills Golf Club tried three times to dig a new well for its course but came up dry. The community is surrounded by five lakes, which serve as reservoirs for the golf course, and pumps about 900,000 gallons a day from its original 18-year-old well near 24th Street and Pecos Road.

But the area needed extra capacity, recalled Kris Black, past president of the Foothills Homeowners Association and a member of the South Mountain Community Citizens Advisory Team.

The issue of moving the Foothills' well has come up several times in the past few years and "ADOT's position is that they have to mitigate that," Black said.

The problem is that ADOT has never said how exactly the wells will be capped and replaced with new ones.

"That's where the crux of this really lies," she said. "They (ADOT) said, 'Well, we'll drill,' but nobody's ever come up with anything about where. It's not easy to move those wells from a variety of standpoints."

Mike Moro, a board member of the Lakewood Community Association and chairman of its lakes subcommittee, said moving the wells is a problem ADOT will have to handle and a risk the community should not have to undertake.

"It's another one of the obstacles that ADOT has to get over," he said.

The lakes have been filled with water for about two decades and could not survive without water covering their 12-inch-thick clay substrate basin.

The community has money to repair its lakes "if something dastardly happened," Moro said, adding that "there would be a big danger there" if ADOT capped the community's existing wells and couldn't find replacement water.

There are at least six wells in the Ahwatukee portion of the proposed Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway, according to a draft water resources report by ADOT. It was unclear as to whether all those wells are operable.

The \$1.7 billion freeway would connect the Loop 202 Santan Freeway in Chandler to the West Valley with a 22-mile stretch of roadway that would wind around South Mountain and connect to 55th Avenue in Laveen.

The Gila River Indian Community, south of Pecos Road, has stated that it doesn't want the freeway on its land. That makes the idea of moving the wells farther south onto reservation land unlikely.

The area also is built on solid rock, which could make drilling new wells more difficult and expensive.

"They've got some serious engineering issues," Black said of ADOT.

ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick said wells in the freeway's path would have to be capped and relocated if the Pecos alignment becomes final.

"The bottom line is that with any wells that we have to disturb, we have to compensate the owners," Burdick said. "If they had water before the freeway, they have to have water after the freeway."

Burdick said he didn't know what the water supply in the area was and couldn't predict how easy it would be to tap new water sources to feed the lakes, fountains and landscaping. He also said ADOT didn't yet have a cost estimate on relocating wells, although one likely would be included in a draft environmental impact statement it is preparing.

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